

1 Corinthians 18-11-25a

This is Sunday morning, the 25th of November, 2018. It's our first live session together in a while, and I apologize for that. I think the press of circumstances that created the need for enjoying some of our past studies over the past few weeks has resolved, and we should be back to something approaching normal, the normal level of hecticcy instead of the circumstances that have prevailed until this holiday weekend. But we have a lot of visitors from out of town with us locally this morning, for which we're grateful, and we'll be picking up this morning our long-lost study in 1 Corinthians, in chapter 15, 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

Following our usual custom, we will take a moment to dedicate our time and our fellowship to the glory of the Lord, and then we'll begin. Father, how grateful we are for the opportunity to get together and to enjoy the relationships and the love and the edification that you have built into our lives in distributing spiritual gifts among believers who promote each other's enjoyment of life and well-being. And we have the building up that comes from those things that the Holy Spirit grants to each one. And as we spend time together, we are encouraged and we're refreshed and renewed and enjoy our like-minded approach before your throne and our appreciation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank you for this passage that deals with the central truths of the Christian faith, and we pray that as we examine them together, that the Holy Spirit will illuminate them and enlighten them and surpass the presentation and enable each one of us to appreciate and come to fuller and better knowledge of these things, so that as we go forward and look to the eventual return of the Lord Jesus and our opportunity to be presented before your throne, we will be qualified, we will know what is happening, we will be those who reflect your glory here on earth and as we enter into new opportunities and new realms in the ages to come.

We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

Let's review the passage itself. We'll read 1 Corinthians, the first 11 verses.

You know that this is a relatively lengthy letter, one of Paul's longer epistles, and this is the longest chapter in this letter, and it is the most detailed presentation, or the place where Paul deals more extensively with resurrection than anywhere else in the Bible. No other place do you find the details. Paul had even preached this to the Corinthians, as he says, and you'll notice when we read this, he says, "I told you this before, but I want to bring it to your knowledge more fully." And so he is going to present it here.

So, having dealt with many other issues earlier in the book, he comes to this, and that's why he says, "Now brethren," or "moreover brethren." It's a logical break. It's a marker of heading in a new direction.

He's been dealing with practicalities in the church. What is the role of the miraculous gifts, which he describes as being temporary? He talks about those things that last, which is faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love. He talks about whether they should be pursuing their own interests or the interests of others. Should they be divided or should they be united? Should they care about their own welfare or the welfare of others?

Having dealt with these more practical matters, he's going to move in a more fundamental, foundational, and theological direction here, and it is really the core of the letter, and it is, in fact, the core of the Christian faith. What he is going to describe here is the essential. Without this, it's a waste of time to be a Christian. It has no meaning. It has no purpose. We are, of all men, most miserable, as he will say.

But let's take a look at these first 11 verses. "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel, which I preached to you, which also you received, and in which you stand."

This is two or three years earlier. Paul had been there in person, and these people had come to faith, had believed the message that Paul preached, and had formed a group, and had been meeting together for fellowship and for worship and for instruction in the truth of the faith ever since. But, having been gone for a few years, they were starting to assimilate other ideas, and people were starting to opine and to bring in points of view that were eroding the central things that Paul had taught them and that defined them as Christians.

Some of this came from the Corinthian culture, which we've talked about. They were at a crossroads. They were a metropolis, and there were a lot of Greek philosophical ideas that were starting to seep in and color and taint and change the truth of the faith that Paul had taught. There were also elements of ancient Judaism in the city, and they had their ideas about what God's plan and purpose might be and what God would and wouldn't do

according to their traditional beliefs. And, in the absence of Paul's apostolic authority and teaching, it was necessary for him to reiterate and to flesh out and to substantiate the things that defined them as believers and defined them as a church.

So, that's what he's talking about here. "I preached this to you, you received it, and in which you stand." This is what makes you who you are. "By which, also, you are being delivered." You are continuing to be defined as and be supported by God's grace as Christians, as those who are headed for glory, "if you hold fast the word which I preached to you unless you believed to no purpose."

And this doesn't change their eternal salvation, but it is going to affect what happens in their earthly life. There is the eternal aspect of salvation. You are born once spiritually. You're entered into the fellowship of believers, what's called the body of Christ, and that's unchangeable. When you are adopted as children by God, he doesn't unadopt you. He doesn't cut you loose. You may be the prodigal son. You may be out with the husks and the swine, but you are never not a son or daughter of God. That's permanent.

However, if you decide to leave and depart, like the prodigal, and you waste your living in riotous activities and so on and sink very low, you are not experiencing the benefits and the definitional attributes of that sonship. You are acting as though you are somebody else. The father still considers him a son when he's out there feeding the pigs, but he himself has thought of himself as something else until he comes to his senses and decides to return.

So, "by which you are saved," by which you are experiencing the benefits of—and this is present tense—by which you are being delivered, sozo. You are being blessed. You are having fulfillment and satisfaction. God's grace is undergirding all the parts of your life, working all things together for good, educating us and training us for the life to come. All of those things are true. You are being saved. You're experiencing the fullness of it and the benefits of it and the grace and the joy of it, unless you believed and it isn't having an effect. It's to no purpose.

Here's the heart of it. Verse three: "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received." Why does Paul say this? He didn't make it up. A lot of people say, "Well, New Testament Christianity is just something Paul made up." And Paul, talking to Corinthians who would know, because they are contemporaries, the Jews in that congregation are contemporaries, and he says, "As I told you when I was here the first time, I didn't make this up. You have heard other people preach. You know, Apollos comes through, Peter comes through, the other apostles and disciples, and they all emphasize the same gospel. It did not originate with Paul. We are not Paulists. We are Christians. And all of the apostles preached the same gospel message, and this is what it is. I delivered to you what I received. Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures."

What Scriptures? There are no New Testament Scriptures. He's not saying according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. This is the Old Testament Scriptures. He says this was prophesied. This isn't an innovation. We didn't just make this up out of whole cloth. It has been anticipated. It was prophesied. It was predicted in the Old Testament Scriptures, which we will see this morning.

"Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." This is why he says Christ instead of Jesus. What does Christ mean in Greek? Christos, the Anointed One. What is that in Hebrew? Mashiach, the Messiah. The Messiah died for our sins according to the Scriptures. The Old Testament Scriptures detailed and predicted the death of the Messiah, the one that God would send.

And verse four, "that he was buried." It's interesting that this is the only place outside of the Gospels—Paul is the only one, I should say—who talks about the burial of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospels and Paul talk about the burial specifically, and this is, you think, "Well, why is the burial important?" Well, it has to do with the Old Testament prophecies. "And that he was—that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures," that he was raised.

In Greek, this is a passive. He was raised. A dead person can't raise himself. He's got to be raised by an outside agency. If you know enough to realize that you need to raise yourself, you're not dead. If you are dead, something else has to raise you. And he was raised from the dead—God the Father, detailed God the Holy Spirit—to resurrect him. And it's another one of the truths of the Trinity that, and in other places, such as in Romans, Paul talks about the fact that it is the power of God through the Holy Spirit that raised Christ from the dead.

According to the Scriptures. Rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. So do the Old Testament Scriptures say that the Messiah will rise on the third day? Evidently so. Paul says they do, and he was a Pharisee. He was an expert in Old Testament Scripture. And now this is contemporary history. He says, "These things took place as they were prophesied." So there is a witness in the Old Testament that God would raise the Messiah from the dead. He says this was known and anticipated ahead of time.

Now he's going to give present evidence. "He was seen by Cephas, by Cephas." This is the Aramaic for Peter, which is Jesus' nickname for Simon Bar-Jonah. One of the first, one of that triad of the leading disciples, Peter, James, and John. This is Peter, Cephas, Cephas. He was seen by Peter.

Now it's interesting to me because there are a number of early post-resurrection appearances by the Lord Jesus. Who was the first person to see him? Mary Magdalene in the garden, right? Thought he was the gardener. Who else saw him that day? Two guys walking on the road to Emmaus, one of whom is Cleopas. They talked to him for a long time, and then their hearts burned within them. And then when they sat down to break bread, suddenly they figured out who he was because he probably uncovered his head. A man shouldn't pray with his head covered. So he uncovers his head, they look at him, it's the Lord Jesus, and then he vanishes out of their sight, and they run back from Emmaus to Jerusalem. The part of the way to Emmaus, back to Jerusalem to talk to the disciples.

And the disciples tell them when they return, "The Lord has appeared to Peter." There is no Gospel record of Jesus appearing personally to Peter on that day, individually and personally. Paul knows it and he says it here. He appeared to Cephas and then to the 12.

The Gospels talk about the ladies' testimony of the empty tomb and that he appeared personally to Mary Magdalene. He appeared to the guys on the road to Emmaus. He appeared to Peter, but nobody records that. That evidently was a very personal and private meeting because Peter had that denial issue to clear up with the Lord. But then that evening, all 12 of them see him, and that's what Paul refers to here. He was seen by the 12.

"After that, he was seen by over 500 brethren at once, most of whom are still alive." Paul is writing in the 50s AD. This happened in circa 30 AD, so this would be 20-odd years later. Most of those people who saw him are still alive.

Now, this is powerful testimony because a lot of those people are circulating in the Roman Empire. It is a commonplace to travel from Israel around to other places toward Rome and everywhere in between. A lot of these people are business people. They deal in goods that traverse. They take, just like Paul, they make journeys and visit relatives that are part of the diaspora.

And you couldn't get away with saying there are living eyewitnesses, 500 living eyewitnesses, better than 400 of whom are still alive. You couldn't get away with saying that if it weren't so, if there were no eyewitnesses. And these people were all together in one place. It's not individual hallucinations. It's not a group hallucination. It's there are 500 eyewitnesses.

Now, how many witnesses do you need to establish a thing according to the Old Testament law? In the mouth of two or three witnesses, a thing is established. You've got 12 on Sunday when Jesus was raised, and these are not gullible men. A lot of them were hard to convince even when Jesus was standing in front of them. They said, "Wait a minute, raised from the dead." Even the disciples wrestled with this at first. And they said, you know, "Did you see what I saw? Was that really him? And, you know, I see the fish and the honeycomb is missing. He ate it. You didn't eat it, did you? What just happened?"

And these are not fly-by-night men. Read what they wrote. Read what they did. These are not needy, psychologically impressionable men. They are tradesmen. They're blue collar. They're workmen. They're fishermen. They're tax collectors. They are common people that work with their hands. And it took a little convincing even at firsthand, but once they became convinced, they became transformed.

And the men who were hiding and who were furtive and fearful and afraid that they would be caught up and killed, once they saw the risen Lord, they become bold. Look at the first few chapters of Acts, at Peter and John going down to the temple. A guy gets healed, a crowd assembles, and Peter, who was afraid to tell a maid next to the fire that he was associated with Jesus, stands up on the steps and preaches a terrific sermon. And the core of that sermon in Acts is the gospel of resurrection, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“He was seen by over 500 brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present. Some have fallen asleep. After that, he was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all, he was seen by me also as by one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God.”

Paul is on a holy mission to stamp out this threat to the Judaistic religion of which he is a card-carrying authority. He is a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He's a student of Gamaliel, which is kind of like being a graduate of Oxford or Harvard, or MIT in your field. And out of nowhere, he changes from being Christianity's most fierce opponent to being its most enthusiastic and energetic exponent. Why? The resurrection. He met the resurrected Jesus and it changed him.

“By the grace of God, I am what I am,” verse 10. “And his grace toward me was not in vain.” What did he say up in verse two? “Did you believe to no purpose?” He says, “God's grace to me wasn't to no purpose. It is having a lasting and ongoing effect on me. I am who I am by God's grace. He was gracious to me and it wasn't in vain. It wasn't to no purpose. I labor more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.”

Whether you heard the gospel from Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Simon the Less, Judas the Less, any of the other disciples, we all preach the same message, and whoever you heard it from, we preached it, you believed it.

This is the central feature of the Christian faith. It is unique. There has never been a religion. There will never be a religion, to my knowledge, that features resurrection. Islam, Muhammad didn't come back from the dead. Confucius didn't come back from the dead. Buddha, all are dead for that matter. Buddha, dead. Aristotle, your Platos, your Sun Tzu, any philosophers, any wise men you wanna name, dead, dead, dead. Fathers of communism, some of them are in glass cases and you can march by and look at their mummies. Dead. The leaders of Egyptian religion, the pharaohs, supposedly deities incarnate, dead. Can look at their mummies in museums.

There's only one figure in history that has ever been raised from the dead, and that is Jesus Christ. It is the central feature of the Christian faith.

Now, people say, “Well, I don't think it's true. Whoever heard of anybody being raised from the dead?” Kind of reminds you of John chapter nine where Jesus healed a blind man, and the Pharisees are all skeptical and saying, you know, “You couldn't have been—find the guy's parents. Let's find out if he really was blind. And how did this happen? Why is it you can suddenly see?” He says, “Look, you know, no people have ever been able to cure congenital blindness. I've been blind from birth, and all I know is once I was blind and now I see. And who's ever been able to cure blindness except God? This guy's gotta be from God because that's the only way you get, you know, blindness from birth cured. Instantaneously, by a word, by a touch.”

And of course, Jesus had been doing this for three years, and crowds of people came to watch this happen. It wasn't like modern faith healing. It was instantaneous. It was permanent. It was complete. If a guy was deaf and dumb, not only was his deafness cured, but he was given speech, vocabulary, things that it takes years to learn as a child, was uploaded into the brain, into the brain. Muscles were energized and enabled, and what we gain by practice, they instantaneously received.

People could not only see, but they could parse what they saw. You know, babies can see, but it takes them a while to figure out that's distant, this is near, you know, this is an object. It's within arm's reach or it's not. That's mom's face. This is—you know, we take time to learn this. The blind that were suddenly able to see were instantaneously given all kinds of additional abilities with it.

And you think about the power that is necessary to do that. And at first it seems, “Well, that's just not possible.” In our experience, you know, we don't have anything approaching that power. But it's a matter of perspective. If you think, “Well, we are the most powerful thing there is, and if we can't do it, it can't be done. If we are the smartest thing there is, and if we can't understand it, it's not understandable. If we are the most logical and mentally gifted, and, well, if we can't make sense of it, it doesn't make sense,” we overestimate ourselves.

Take a child of five. You know, a child of five has a very limited grasp, and there's a lot of things that seem to make sense to them. And there are things that don't make sense to them, like pretty much all of the adult world. And try to explain what you're doing to a child of five.

Well, if we are humble enough to consider that we might be the child of five, and that there might be things that are too wonderful for us that are not going to be immediately understandable to us without a lot of explanation and a lot of foundation being built, then the resurrection is going to seem like a fantasy.

I'm gonna read you something. I'm gonna summarize it real quickly. But I ran across a man named John Piper because he has a sermon library online that is similar to the one that I work for. He's next most extensive. He's got thousands of sermons and articles and things online. And his theological perspective is a little bit different, but I ran across this a while back and I thought it was a really good summary and I wanna give him credit for it. As I say, I was exploring this sermon library to compare and contrast the one that I work for.

But he has an article here, and his organization is called DesiringGod.org. And this is an article entitled, "Eight Reasons Why I Believe That Jesus Rose From The Dead." And I think it is as good a summary as any. There are others.

First of all, and it follows interestingly pretty closely Paul's argument here. So what does Paul first say? It was predicted ahead of time. We have present evidence for it. We've got living eyewitnesses who will attest that Jesus came back. Five hundred people in one place saw him. The apostles, who are basically all gonna end up giving their lives for this—you could make up a fantasy and try to make money. You could make up a fantasy and try to become important or get promoted into government or whatever. But why would you invent a fantasy and then die for it, be persecuted for it, be jailed over and over for it? It doesn't—you really got to stretch to decide that, well, they were all in the grip of a hallucination. People don't typically go to the mat for a hallucination, and they don't all have the same hallucination across years. And it doesn't birth theology. It doesn't comport with an entire record of Old Testament Scripture. It doesn't have details that are obscure and yet are discernible when you go back and research its roots.

Number one from John Piper: Jesus himself testified to his coming resurrection from the dead. Jesus spoke openly about this all during his earthly ministry. "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again." That's Mark 8:31. That's halfway through the book of Mark. You know, it's got 16 chapters. Same thing in Matthew 17:22. The same thing in Luke 9:22.

Those who consider the resurrection of Christ unbelievable will probably say that Jesus was deluded, or more likely that the early church put these statements in his mouth to make him teach the falsehood that they themselves conceived. It's all post hoc fabrication. But those who read the Gospels and come to the considered conviction that the one who speaks so compellingly through these witnesses is not a figment of foolish imagination will be unsatisfied with this effort to explain away Jesus' own testimony to his resurrection from the dead.

Now that's quite a mouthful. What is he saying? Those who read the Gospels and realize that the words of Jesus are compelling, they don't sound like something that was made up after the fact by a bunch of hallucinatory people. And this is a reference to and an encouragement to sample the authority of Scripture itself. Anybody who's on a search for truth should try to inform themselves.

This is the hazard of the mainstream media. This is the hazard of blogs and only listening to people who agree with you, is that you get a very one-sided view. If you're on a quest for truth, you wanna hear from all sides, right? This is what a court does. We've got the prosecution and we've got the defense. Give me your best case.

Now, just for purposes of demonstration, demonstration, here are—this is the opposition. Here's Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*. Here's Sam Harris, *The End of Faith*. Here is Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great*. Here is *Science on Trial* by Douglas Futuyama, a very well-respected scientist and professor. Here is *Why Evolution Is True* by Jerry Coyne. Here is *Ever Since Darwin* by Stephen Jay Gould. Here is *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins, perhaps the most famous of all of these. And here is *Faith Versus Fact*, another one by Jerry Coyne, who trains his formidable intellectual firepower on religious faith. Hard to see how any reasonable person can resist the conclusions of a book that is the basis of his superbly argued book, et cetera.

You could read the backs of these. Now, just look at the page count here. I have read all of these books so that you don't have to. The New Testament has 7,957 verses in it. If you leave out the book of Revelation, which has 404 verses, you get down to about 7,550 verses. It's not that much to read compared to that, right?

My encouragement to anyone who doubts the resurrection: do what I have done. Read the Scriptures and ask yourself the question as you read, are these people credible or incredible? Does this read like mythology or does it read like, "Here's what I saw"? Does Jesus sound like a figment of someone's imagination? Was he deluded? Was he having visions? Was he epileptic? Read the Apostle Paul. Was he an epileptic? Did he have a fit on the Damascus Road and a stroke, and that's why he suddenly changed? Read the Scriptures. If I can read that much, people can read 7,500 verses and consider it for yourself.

Jesus was either insane or an outright culpable liar because he himself claimed to be the one who would be taken by the hands of men, crucified, and would rise again the third day, which identifies him as the Son of God raised by the power of God. So there is no proof that there's a God. Yes, there is. The resurrection proves that there's a God because there had to be a God to raise Jesus from the dead. This is the essence of Paul's argument to the Corinthians, and it is a powerful argument that resonates all the way into the present. Your Christian faith is only valid and only meaningful if Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Everything else comes afterward.

"Well, I don't like the God of the Old Testament." Richard Dawkins certainly doesn't like him. Well, what Richard Dawkins doesn't understand is that in God's dealings with Israel, this was a supernatural situation. He said, "You are a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." What God does with Israel is not definitional. It's not for all time. It's not for now.

Unless God is still in the Ark of the Covenant and present in a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire, determining who you're gonna go to battle against and how much of them you're going to wipe out, who do you make treaties with and who do you wipe out, what is the nature of justice in Israel—that is a sign people with the sign presence of God, and it is unique. It is stated throughout the Old Testament to be unique. God says, "There's a lot of nations, but I've only chosen one in which to put my name, and I deal with them uniquely."

You can explain everything in the Old Testament in the light of the fact that that is a supernatural presence-of-God nation, and they are a sign. They are symbolic. They communicate truths. The unique and special covenant that God had with them at Sinai isn't designed to be a model for everybody's law unless everybody's got God's presence in their midst. It was designed to emphasize this is what's important. Death penalty occurs here because this is a fundamental truth about sin and about evil and so on.

So as Piper goes through here, he reiterates Paul's first point, that this was predicted ahead of time. Jesus said it was going to happen, and it did. The Old Testament predicted that it would happen, and it did.

Number two: the tomb was empty on Easter. And it's very interesting, even when you read skeptics, especially first-century Jews, nobody seriously disputed that the tomb was empty. It was pretty much an undeniable truth. So you have to explain the empty tomb in one of three ways. Either his enemies stole the body, which doesn't make a lot of sense. None of them ever claimed to have done. But if Christianity gets started and it's all about the risen Lord, somebody could have said, "No it isn't. I've got his body right here. Here's his skeleton. Here's his pierced, crucified body." None of them ever did.

And Christianity began in the very city where he was crucified, which is Jerusalem. It would have been one thing if they'd gone off to Antioch or Corinth or Ephesus or some far-off place and said, "Well, you know that Jesus that was crucified down—that was raised from the dead." The resurrection was preached within days of it happening in the city where it happened. And there were eyewitnesses everywhere to the crucifixion and eyewitnesses everywhere to the resurrection.

And the upshot of parsing all of that was nobody disputed the empty tomb. So either his enemies stole his body, if it was empty; his friends stole the body, and that was an early rumor. You remember Matthew 28, they said, "Well, his disciples have stolen his body." Well, if they knew he was dead and had taken his body, why would they suddenly become martyrs for a faith when they knew the guy was dead? Why would they preach he was alive within days?

The third and most reasonable explanation is Jesus was raised from the dead. There's some who say, "Well, he was unconscious and woke back up in the tomb," which is really kind of funny because there's a great big rock that takes two people to move. He's been crucified and whipped and left for dead, but suddenly he wakes and he's strong enough to get up and roll away the stone and walk out himself. So he awoke, removed the stone, overcame the soldiers, and vanished from history after a few meetings with his disciples in which he convinced them that he was risen from the dead.

Even the foes of Jesus did not try this line. He was obviously dead. The Romans saw to that. The Romans were expert in killing people and making sure they were dead. And they didn't even break his legs because they knew he was dead. He was manifestly, obviously, in the rigor mortis effect there. So the only reasonable explanation is that God raised Jesus from the dead, as was predicted.

Of course, people who want a naturalistic explanation for everything don't find this satisfactory. Well, again, you have a presupposition that everything is susceptible to a naturalistic explanation, and yet there are so many cases where, like the early days in Europe, where you couldn't sail over the horizon. Well, everything must be where I can see it, and there can't be another continent because I can't see it and can't get to it. Everything is within the circumscribed element of my observation.

Well, with a little more humility, we can recognize, as Shakespeare did, that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy, Horatio. And we're a child of five. There can be an originator for things. Anybody who does computer programming, anybody who works with video games realizes that there is no problem. Even science has now begun speculating that we're all a giant simulation and that it's an element of programming. There's just too many perfections and too many elements of the universe that seem to be optimized for certain things to take place. And it's as current as a lot of other things that, well, maybe we're just all in a simulation. Well, that implies that there's somebody smarter than us. Nobody has a serious problem with imagining that there could be—most speculation about life on other planets is that they're smarter than us. Well, okay, if they are, maybe they know something we don't.

Number three: the disciples were almost immediately transformed from men who were hopeless and fearful after the crucifixion into men who were confident and bold witnesses of the resurrection. You read Acts chapter two, Acts chapter three, and Acts chapter four, and it is amazing.

Now, what would convince somebody so fully and give them such great courage? Peter lost his fear of death. Why did he scurry into the shadows the night that Jesus was arrested? Why did all of the disciples flee? They were afraid to die. Why did they become bold witnesses of Jesus Christ and brave the wrath of all of the Judaistic religion and the Romans fearlessly afterward? They were eyewitnesses of the fact that death is not the end. Death is nothing to fear. God is with you as long as you're alive, and after death is resurrection. And the truth of the resurrection made them no longer susceptible to the fear of death, and they didn't fear it.

And in some cases, Paul said, "You know, I'm ready to go now, but God seems to think it's better for me to stick around and help you for a little while longer. But absent from the body, present with the Lord, that's good for me. But it's also good for me to stay here and continue my apostolic ministry." But they lost their fear of death because of witnessing multiple times the risen Lord.

Paul claimed that not only had he seen the risen Christ, but that 500 others had seen him also, and many were still alive when he made this public claim. This is our passage, 15:6 of 1 Corinthians. What makes this so relevant is, John Piper says, this was written to Greeks who were skeptical of such claims when many of these witnesses were still alive. It was a risky claim if it could be disproved by a little firsthand research. But Paul boldly makes it because it's true.

The sheer existence, number five from Piper here, the sheer existence of a thriving, empire-conquering early Christian church supports the truth of the resurrection claim. The church spread on the power of the testimony that Jesus was raised from the dead and that God had thus made him both Lord and Christ. That's Peter talking in Acts chapter two. The lordship of Christ over all nations is based on his victory over death.

And by the way, this wasn't a conquest by the sword, as you have with Islam or with some other religious zealots. This was a conquest of nations by spiritual truth, by the message of grace, the message of God's mercy and love expressed in the Lord Jesus Christ. People say God is cruel and God has death penalties for this, that, and the other. We don't pay any of that. The Lord Jesus did it for us. The problem has been solved. God defined the problem of sin and God solved the problem of sin by the death of his own Son. And all we have to do is accept that. And we are qualified to walk through the gates of eternal life and to be resurrected ourselves.

And on the postulate of an omnipotent God, if God can bring the universe into creation in the same way that I can bring a computer program into creation, I can write a video game. Matthew and I wrote a primitive video game years ago on the old TI-99. No, TI, yeah, it was a 99, with a whopping 16K of transient program area. But we wrote a game that will live in infamy, Bloody Awful Space Battles. And things flew through space and shot at each other. And we did the calculations to figure out if what you shot would intersect the target, then if so,

would it blow up? But we were the creators of that universe and we defined its rules. And if a spaceship blew up and we wanted to bring it back, we just wrote the code, and here it is again.

A character that dies in an FPS game, a first-person shooter game, press a button, comes right back. The God that is capable of creating us is able to recreate us, to bring us right back, exactly as we are and yet enhanced, transformed, better than we started out.

To think that there could be so much, no such God or there is no such God, is just really a failure of grasp. It's a failure of intellectual observation. We look around and see all kinds of creatures that are below us. Major doesn't understand what I do. Zoe the cat doesn't understand what I do. She has a very limited sense of what's going on. And for Zoe to think, "Well, this whole notion is ridiculous. What I do is just"—because of her limitations, she can only go so far. Major can, bless his heart, can only go so far. We, bless our hearts, can only go so far.

And what Paul is arguing here from the resurrection is that it is attested. There is solid eyewitness evidence. And that eyewitness evidence, once it is recorded, is good. It's just as good as what we have in a court of law. Eyewitnesses are brought back years after a crime. What did you see? Are you credible? Are these witnesses credible? And you look at their subsequent conduct, their subsequent lives. Were they in it for profit? People say, "Oh, Christianity is a way to control and manipulate people and suck money out of their pockets." Did any of the founders of Christianity do that? Paul worked with his own hands. He made tents. He said, "I could demand that you support me, but I'm not going to do it because I don't want to obscure the truth of the gospel, which is God's grace."

God is our creator and God has the power of life. He gives it to us once and he will give it to us again.

We're gonna pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to see that Paul takes this eyewitness testimony: he was seen by me, he was seen by the 12, he was seen by 500. He was predicted to rise in the Old Testament. We're gonna look at those Old Testament Scriptures, and then we're gonna see, well, where does he go with that? What is he gonna say beginning in verse 12?

"Now, if Christ is preached that he's been raised from the dead, how does some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" And he's gonna go on to say, if there's no resurrection of the dead, then Jesus isn't who he said he was. And if you go down to verse 16, "If the dead do not rise, Christ is not risen. If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile. You are still in your sins. Those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only," verse 19, "if in this life only we hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable."

If Christianity is just some kind of a crutch for the weak, then we're pathetic. That's what Paul says. But verse 20, and that's where we're headed, it's a different reality. We are not of all men most pathetic. Christ is raised from the dead, and that transforms life. It ought to transform us the way that it did Jesus' first disciples. And it gives us direction and hope. And we're not weak. We're not pathetic. We're not needy.

You look at the Christians that have gone before us, and by the way, it's not anti-scientific to be a Christian. Go to Wikipedia sometime and look up the entry under List of Christians in Science and Technology. On my laptop, there are 20 pages, 20 screens, of people from every branch of science, past and present, who are—to get on this list, you can't just be accused of being a Christian. These are people who are Christians, they are elders, they're bishops, they are active in their church, they have proclaimed themselves to be Christians. They are in life sciences, they're in biology, they're in astrophysics, they're in every—just read who they are and ask yourself, is it credible to claim that if you're a Christian, that's the end of scientific inquiry, and that's why Christianity should be banished from all classrooms, because people will just say, "Well, God did it," and they won't research?

History is replete. Science was founded by Christians, and even to the present day, it's full of Christians. And it doesn't interfere with scientific inquiry at all. In fact, the foundational—I was reading one of the guys on this list—he is the guy that defined most of the scientific terms that we use today, all kinds of things that we just take for granted. This guy invented the vocabulary. When you talk science, you're talking what this Christian guy invented to have a vocabulary to talk about it.

It's a real interesting list. It's called List of Christians in Science and Technology in Wikipedia, and it's not just Galileo and Kepler. I mean, it's a long, long list, and guys have written books on science and then turned around and written books on theology.

So it's not anti-scientific. It's not anti-reasonable. You can't say, "Well, anybody who's reasonable can't believe in the resurrection." Paul makes a reasonable case from eyewitness testimony and from prophetic witness that is fulfilled in the New Testament, and these things are not the work of inventors. The Christian church didn't, in the second or third century, go back and write the New Testament and say, "Well, see how Jesus fulfilled." A lot of these prophecies are so subtle, like the third day, rise again the third day. Try to find that in the Old Testament. We'll look at it after the break.

But let's pause here and refresh ourselves.